


Bret Bell
515 E. 45th Street
Savannah, GA 31405



May 18, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this as my enthusiastic application for the position of Tybee Island City Manager. I'm a former Tybee resident, frequent Tybee visitor, and longtime Savannah public administrator. With this background, I am uniquely qualified to lead Tybee into the future that this unique community deserves.

I've spent the past five years serving as Savannah's Chief Operating Officer, overseeing a portfolio of departments focused on the City's internal operations while serving as key member of the City Manager's Leadership Team. Among the departments I managed was Special Events, Film and Tourism, where I took a leadership role in development of a Nighttime Management Plan, a Tourism Master Plan, and negotiating solutions that balanced the quality of life of our residents with the needs of the tourism industry.

I did this while overseeing construction of the largest capital project in Savannah's history – the \$170 million Enmarket Arena, which opened in 2022. The City Manager turned to me after the project had fallen off-track, threatening to significantly push back the construction schedule, send the project over budget and erode public confidence. I took a big-tent, collaborative approach to project management, pulling together a team from across the organization and leading them through three years of complicated problem solving in an area of heavy flooding and significant soil contamination. We completed the project on schedule, and last year the Enmarket Arena was named the best arena of its size in the Southeast.

Since the start of 2024, I have been focused on implementing a new data and innovation initiative as a major focus of my new role as Chief Information and Public Affairs Officer. The change was part of a broader restructuring undertaken to create a smarter City Government better positioned to meet the rapidly changing needs of Savannah's unprecedented growth.

Tackling such challenges is my calling card. When the City of Savannah initiated a radical new budgeting process and set out to reduce annual expenditures by \$12 million, the City Manager tapped me to co-lead the process. The priority-driven model we implemented, called Budgeting for Outcomes, used teams of employees – more than 100 in all – to focus available revenue while supporting the City's most important goals. The process helped the City meet budget targets without increasing taxes or resorting to budget balancing gimmicks that would simply increase financial problems in later years. And, perhaps more importantly, it changed the organizational culture to one of service collaboration in order to meet community priorities.

When Recorder's Court was on the verge of collapse due to judicial infighting and mismanagement by the Court Administrator, the City Manager once again turned to me. I interviewed all 28 Court employees, then dug deeper with former court administrators and judges in higher courts. I negotiated a complicated forced removal of the Court Administrator and her deputy, recruited a former court executive out of retirement to take over, and worked with the Georgia Legislature to change State Law to transfer administrative control from the elected Chief Judge to the City Manager. Then I worked with the new Court Administrator to develop a restructuring plan that has led to a more efficient court system and increased fine collections.

I've been recognized as a national expert in strategic communications. And if there's one thing I've learned serving under five City Managers, it's that the ability to effectively communicate one's self can make or break an administration. Internally, it builds team and helps reach common ground and fair compromise. Externally, it wins public support, without which real progress is not possible. I developed the City's first Strategic Communications Plan, launched a comprehensive rebranding initiative, built a government television station from the ground-up, and launched numerous citizen engagement initiatives through the years designed to catalyze the public to create solutions to some of the community's thorniest problems.

I am confident that this experience makes me uniquely qualified to serve as Tybee City Manager. I look forward to discussing your community's exciting future.

Sincerely,

Bret Bell

Bret Bell

BRET BELL

515 E. 45TH STREET / SAVANNAH, GA 31405

EXECUTIVE MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATOR

Project Management / Budget Planning / Strategic Communications / Citizen Engagement

Energetic, confident, results-driven professional with management experience at the highest level of municipal government, using a team-based approach and excellent communications skills to drive change and increase performance. Strategic communications expert with proven record implementing successful citizen engagement efforts to solve community problems. Ten years of experience as a deadline-driven, award-winning editor and reporter covering politics, government, and special projects.



PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

CITY OF SAVANNAH, Savannah, GA

Chief Information and Public Affairs Officer	Current
Chief Operating Officer	2019 to 2024
Assistant to the City Manager	2015 to 2019
Director of Public Information	2006 to 2015

Key member of City Manager's Executive Leadership Team, which develops service delivery strategy for 2,500-employee, full-service municipal government with \$560 million annual budget. Oversaw development of the Enmarket Arena, the largest capital project in Savannah's history, in addition to management of the following departments and divisions, with budgets totaling \$50 million and 300 full-time employees:

Information and Public Affairs Officer

DEPARTMENTS MANAGED

- ◆ **Innovation + Technology Services** (\$12 million budget; 38 FTEs). Services include planning, implementation and maintenance of the City's data and voice networks, radio systems and application systems.
- ◆ **Savannah-Chatham Recorder's Court** (\$4.1 million budget; 36 FTEs). Serves as Savannah's municipal and livability court, as well as the court of first appearance for County felony cases. Roughly 52,000 criminal and traffic cases filed annually.
- ◆ **Marketing and Communications** (\$1.6 million budget; 15 FTEs). Facilitates media relations, events, marketing, and communications; produces Savannah Government Television (SGTV); manages City website and social media initiatives.
- ◆ **311 Action Center** (\$434,000 budget; 5 FTEs). Serves as Savannah's centralized service request system, managing more than 50,000 requests for service annually.
- ◆ **Municipal Archives** (\$468,000 budget; 4 FTEs). Administers the City's records management program, and develops, preserves and makes accessible records documenting the City's history.
- ◆ **Policy and External Affairs** (\$586,000 budget; 4 FTEs). Coordinates strategic external relationships in public and private sectors; manages state and federal lobbying efforts; coordinates grant development process.

Continued

DEPARTMENTS
MANAGED

Chief Operating Officer: Municipal Operations Service Center

- ◆ **Facilities Maintenance and Operations** (\$6.8 million budget; 31 FTEs). Maintenance and repairs of all City facilities and mechanical equipment, janitorial and security services.
- ◆ **Real Estate Services** (\$8.3 million budget; 14 FTEs). Management of real property transactions; Visitors Center Operations; Civic Center operations; Enmarket Arena and Grayson Stadium contract management.
- ◆ **Cemeteries** (\$2.5 million budget; 23 FTEs). Management and maintenance of five City-owned cemeteries, including tourism management in Bonaventure and Colonial cemeteries.
- ◆ **Financial Services** (\$7.8 million budget; 71 FTEs). Oversees payroll and accounts payable, City investing and borrowing activities, procurement, tax collection and business licensing, and utility services. (*note: realignment in 2021 moved department directly beneath City Manager*)
- ◆ **Fleet Services** (\$6.1 million budget; 43 FTEs). Provides preventative maintenance, major and minor repairs for fleet of 1,200; fueling operations and new vehicle purchase/preparation.
- ◆ **Special Events, Film and Tourism** (\$1 million; 9 FTEs). Directs programs that balance events, film and tourism activities with residential quality of life and economic development; issues temporary-use right-of-way permits for encroachment to street vendors, restaurants and other businesses.
- ◆ **Organizational Performance and Accountability** (\$374,000 budget; 3 FTEs). Independent, objective assurance and internal auditing team designed to add value to and improve the City's operations.
- ◆ **Risk Management** (\$2.4 million budget; 6 FTEs). Responsible for the protection and preservation of the City's resources and assets through loss prevention and control; insurance policies; and claims and settlements related to general liability, workers' compensation, property and auto liability.
- ◆ **Arena Development**. Led team for three years that managed development of \$170 million state-of-the-art arena and supporting infrastructure, which opened in February 2022.

Assistant to the City Manager

- ◆ **Legislative Affairs** (3 FTEs). Oversaw City Council coordination and constituent services, policy development, management of City Council Agenda and annual State and Federal Legislative Agenda and lobbying strategy.
- ◆ **Recorder's Court** (\$2.8 million budget; 30 FTEs). Served as Savannah's municipal and livability court, as well as the court of first appearance for County felony cases. Roughly 52,000 criminal and traffic cases filed annually.
- ◆ **Public Information Office** (\$503,000 budget; 7 FTEs). Developed and implemented the City's communications strategy, including 24-hour cable television channel, City website and social media channels.

Selected Contributions & Accomplishments

- ◆ Oversaw stabilization and restructuring of failing Recorder's Court, which included change of leadership, department-wide personnel investigation, revamping of docketing system, and new State legislation.
- ◆ Developed operational assessment of Fleet Services to identify and outsource bottlenecks, reducing fleet downtime. Implemented lease-equity program that reduced age of fleet by 30%. Developed plan to outsource parts inventory function and create first ever customer service unit.
- ◆ Launched Technology Governance process that centralized technology procurement and implementation, and identified areas of tech collaboration across departments, increasing effectiveness and creating savings.

ORGANIZATIONAL
CHANGE

Continued

Selected Contributions & Accomplishments continued

CAPITAL PROJECT
MANAGEMENT

- ◆ Led restructuring process that returned \$170 million arena development project to within budget and schedule after suffering two years of delay. Enmarket Arena recognized as best facility of its size in America during its first year of operation.

CONSENSUS
BUILDING

- ◆ Crafted strategy that led to first increase in Savannah's hotel-motel tax in 30 years, generating \$6 million in new revenue annually. Reached multiple deals to develop consensus among tourism industry, City Council and legislative delegation.

STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATIONS

- ◆ Co-chaired leadership team that implemented new budgeting process called Budgeting for Outcomes, which used Council priorities and employee teams to guide City's \$300 million annual spending plan and develop structural changes and efficiencies that reduced expenditures by \$12 million annually.

- ◆ Oversaw 10-month redevelopment of City website and implementation of content management system, which improved efficiency and dramatically increased connectivity between citizens and City government.

- ◆ Led rebranding effort and implementation that developed a single unified City identity for the first time while phasing out more than 22 separate department logos.

PROFESSIONAL
EXPERIENCE

SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS, Savannah, GA (60,000 circulation)

Special Projects Leader 2004 to 2006

Government Team Leader 2002 to 2004

City Government Reporter 2000 to 2002

Developed a deep understanding of all aspects of municipal government while covering the City of Savannah for award-winning daily newspaper. Led four-reporter regional Government Team, and coordinated political coverage across multiple jurisdictions. Promoted to Special Projects, where I became one of the State's leading experts on public records while focusing on in-depth investigations and major issues reporting.

Selected Contributions & Accomplishments

HONORS

- ◆ Series on corruption in small town Georgia led to resignation of public official and launch of probe by Georgia Bureau of Investigation.
- ◆ Named one of "Georgia's Most Influential Journalists" by *Georgia Trend Magazine*.
- ◆ Presenter: 2004, 2005 Investigative Reporters and Editors Association Annual Conference
- ◆ First Place, Hard News Writing: 2006 Georgia Press Association Awards.
- ◆ Story of the Year: 2004 Georgia Press Association Awards
- ◆ Presented First Amendment Award for doing the most in Georgia to promote open records: 2004 Georgia Press Association Awards
- ◆ First Place, Investigative Reporting: 2004 Georgia AP Newspaper Awards
- ◆ First Place, Hard News Writing: 2003 Georgia Press Association Awards
- ◆ First Place, Beat Reporting, 2002 Georgia Associated Press Newspaper Awards

PROFESSIONAL
EXPERIENCE

THE DURANGO HERALD, Durango, CO (10,000 circulation)

News Editor 1998 to 2000

Reporter 1997 to 1998

Oversaw 14-employee newsroom, including supervision of all designers, reporters and copy editors. Responsible for all editorial content of seven-day daily newspaper, including story and photo assignments and selection, editing, page lineup and special project coordination. Initiated staff development program that increased productivity and reduced errors 20%. Beats as reporter included City Government, Education and 2 Indian tribes.

Continued

**PROFESSIONAL
EXPERIENCE**

GLOUCESTER DAILY TIMES, Gloucester, MA (*10,000 circulation*)

Waterfront Reporter

1996 to 1997

Internship: Rockport Reporter

Summer 1995

Wrote daily stories covering the fishing industry and waterfront development issues for 6-day daily newspaper. Winner of New England Newspaper Association Story of the Year for coverage of apartment complex's collapse into Gloucester Harbor, as well as follow-up investigations into negligence on the part of the building's owners. Wrote two stories daily covering all beats in Town of Rockport, including weekly column and intense coverage of Board of Selectmen.

EDUCATION

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, Statesboro, GA
Master of Business Administration

Graduated 2013

THE COLORADO COLLEGE, Colorado Springs, CO
Bachelor of Arts
Major: Political Science / Minor: Journalism

Graduated 1996

**COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT**

Past President, Metropolitan Savannah Rotary Club
Board of Directors, Union Mission
Board of Directors, The Creative Coast
Board Member, Telfair Museums Cultural Diversity Task Force
Citizen Advocate, Savannah-Chatham Citizen Advocacy Inc.
Leadership Savannah Graduate

PERSONAL

Married 20 years to wife Adrienne
13-year-old son, Hal
Former Tybee Island resident
Avid runner
Avid skier
Failed kiteboarder

REFERENCES

[Redacted references]

Michelle A. Owens

(407) 761-2926 | [REDACTED]

May 15, 2024

Mayor Brian West
403 Butler Avenue
Tybee Island, Georgia 31328

Greetings Mayor West:

It would be my privilege to be considered for the position of City Manager for Tybee Island. Over the past year, I have served in this capacity on an interim basis, gaining invaluable insights into the city's daily operations and ongoing needs. My extensive professional background in public administration, community engagement, and community and economic development uniquely equips me to tackle the myriad challenges of a small, coastal community.

As the current interim city manager and former assistant city manager, I have fostered productive collaborations with the Tybee Island City Council, private consultants, local, state, and federal officials, and city staff. Together, we have successfully addressed significant challenges such as beach preservation, coastal resiliency, short-term rental housing, tourism growth, stormwater management, and unpermitted mass gatherings, to name a few.

Furthermore, I have improved city operations by working with department heads to manage staffing and budgets more efficiently, create succession plans, and implement goal-setting and performance evaluations. In my leadership role, I continue to emphasize a work ethic centered on transparency, accountability, and professionalism.

During the five years I have worked for the City of Tybee Island, I have written successful applications for grants and awards that showcase Tybee as a gem on the Georgia coast. This includes winning three Visionary City Awards in a row from the Georgia Municipal Association between 2021-2023.

Tybee Island holds a special place in my heart. I grew up near Thunderbolt and spent many summers at the beach with my extended family, many of whom still live in the area. As a Tybee Island homeowner, I am deeply committed to this community and am eager to continue serving it for many years to come.

All the best,



Michelle A. Owens

Résumé

MICHELLE A. OWENS

(407) 761-2926



PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2019-Present **City of Tybee Island**

- Interim City Manager—*April 2023 to present*
- Assistant City Manager/Communications and Outreach Director—*December 2021 to April 2023*
- Main Street Director—*September 2019 to August 2021*

2003-2011 and **Orange County Government, Orlando, Florida** **2015-2019**

- Executive Director, Pine Hills Neighborhood Improvement District—*2015 to 2019*
Oversaw staff, leveraged partnerships, and developed budgets to initiate, coordinate, and monitor various projects, programs, and services aimed at improving public safety, stimulating economic development, and fostering community engagement in a large, economically depressed community west of Downtown Orlando
- Principal Planner, Neighborhood Preservation & Revitalization Division—*2005-2011*
Led community planning initiatives and grant-funded programs in multiple urban neighborhoods to maintain infrastructure, attract economic development, improve safety and security and strengthen neighborhood associations.
- Senior Planning & Development Assistant/Fair Housing Coordinator, Housing & Community Development Division—*2003-2005*
Evaluated funding applications, awarded funding, and monitored sub-recipient compliance for federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds. Ensured compliance with CDBG regulations, required training, annual financial reporting, and federal Fair Housing laws.

OTHER RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

2011-2020 **Small Business Owner**

- Owner/Director
Owner of an award-winning wellness business specializing in yoga classes and retreats for private clients, corporate wellness programs, senior citizens, and wounded military veterans.

2009-2011 **Avalon Park Property Owners Association Inc., Orlando, Florida**

- President
Oversaw a \$5 million annual budget for a 7-member board in maintaining community infrastructure, architectural standards, covenant enforcement, dispute resolution, and government relations for a 3,600-home community.

EDUCATION

PhD Community Engagement, ABD Status, Expected completion Spring 2024
Point Park University; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

MA Urban Anthropology
University of Memphis; Memphis, Tennessee

BA Mass Communications
Savannah State University; Savannah, Georgia

EXPERIENCED EXECUTIVE AND EFFECTIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR

Mission driven leader with over 20 years serving in the highest levels of government. Substantive experience working with both Democratic and Republican Members of Congress, federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector on policy, budget, and leadership issues. Strong skills in negotiating complex deals, navigating political environments, building diverse partnerships, and communicating with the public.

Executive Leadership | Team, Partnership and Human Capital Development | Inclusive Workplace Creation | Strategic Planning and Implementation | Budgeting | Conservation Financing | Public Policy | Non-Profit Board Leadership | Public Speaking | Process Improvement | Transparent Decision-making | Communications and Outreach

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- Raised over \$700 million for wildlife conservation, wildfire prevention, coastal restoration and rehabilitation, and other conservation projects across the United States and its territories.
- Principal Democratic Senate staff architect of the \$1.8 trillion fiscal year 2016 appropriations and tax package and the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, the two-year federal budget deal that lifted sequester caps.
- Served as the Sergeant at Arms and Deputy Sergeant at Arms of the U.S. Senate, the largest and most diverse organization within the body with over 850 employees and an annual budget exceeding \$200 million.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Senior Vice President for Corporate and External Affairs

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

2023 – Present

Cultivated private and public financing for the nation's largest conservation grant-making organization.

- Responsible for raising significant federal, other public, private sector, and individual resources for the Foundation's conservation program (over \$700 million in FY2023).
- Assess, evaluate, and respond to government's legislative and policy efforts.
- Align key external affairs functions of the Foundation – Development, Communications, Executive, Congressional and Agency Relations – with the conservation and financial strategy of the Foundation.

Attorney at Law/Managing Partner

Oldaker & Willison, LLC

2017 - Present

Partner in a Washington, DC-based bipartisan government relations & law firm and its affiliated firms National Health Advisors (a collaborative venture with Epstein, Becker, & Green, the nation's largest health care and labor law firm), and the National Group, a government relations and lobbying firm.

- Managed the firm's conservation and the environment, state and local infrastructure, renewable energy and energy efficiency, and the federal budget and appropriations clients.
- Provided advice and developed strategies for clients on engagement with Congress, the White House, and executive agencies.

Chief of Staff

U.S. Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid

2015 – 2016

Led and oversaw a diverse staff of 150 and facilitated all aspects of the Senator's leadership communications, policy, and national and Nevada political operations, including fundraising.

- Maintained working relationships with all 100 Senators regarding legislative and policy matters, and advised Democratic Senators on legislative, policy, and institutional matters.
- Lead Democratic Senate staff negotiator for budget and appropriations legislation, including the 2016 appropriations and tax package and the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015.
- Maintained close ties with the Nevada State government and dozens of local governments.
- Created the Senate Democratic Caucus' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative to attract and retain highly qualified minority applicants to high level policy jobs in Democratic Senate Member and Committee offices.
- Maintained thorough knowledge and understanding of the legislative process, Senate Floor procedures and the Federal budget, including day-to-day relationships with Cabinet-level officials.

United States Senate Sergeant at Arms and Deputy Sergeant at Arms

United States Senate

2007 – 2010 and 2013 - 2015

Supervised and managed senior organization leadership staff responsible for all day-to-day operations of the U.S. Senate, including the Chief Information Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Contracting Officer, the General Counsel, human resources, facilities management, security and emergency preparedness, and police operations.

- Led the organization through a comprehensive strategic planning exercise that to an overhaul of the annual budget and the Key Performance Indicators.
- Designed and implemented an organization-wide restructuring and buy-out program that realigned staff and budget to meet agency needs and goals while maintaining and improving services, including overhauling the Senate Hair Care operations that turned an annual operating loss of \$1 million into a net profit.
- Maintained day-to-day relationships with Senate and House Leadership and committee staff, police, leaders from other federal agencies and departments, and the media.
- Developed an employee engagement program that actively sought employee input on programs, operations, and policies and implemented employee morale programs such as Capitol Dome tours and Senate Floor tours.
- Member of the U.S. Capitol Police Board overseeing a police force of 2000 sworn and civilian personnel.
- Member of the Capitol Accessibility Services Board, the oversight body for the U.S. Capitol Guide Service.

Vice President of Public Policy and External Relations

Battelle Memorial Institute

2010 - 2013

Implemented Battelle's government business strategy on behalf of its Energy, National Security, and Life Sciences' global businesses.

- Served as Battelle's principal interface with Congress, the White House, executive agencies, agencies, Foreign Embassies and public policy organizations.
- Reorganized and streamlined the office to increase efficiency, strengthen services and reduce costs to provide more support to clients.

- Led Battelle's participation in the Smithsonian's Great American Hall of Wonders, an exhibition celebrating the American spirit of innovation.

Senate Democratic Staff Director

Appropriations Subcommittee for Energy and Water Development 1999 – 2007

Responsible for developing the \$35 billion annual spending bill for the U.S. Department of Energy, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation and related agencies.

- Specific expertise in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and power generation technologies.
- Provided fiscal and programmatic oversight of federal departments and agencies.
- Worked with Democratic and Republican Senators and the Federal Government on special project requests.

EDUCATION

Juris Doctorate, George Washington University Law School, admitted to the Virginia Bar

Masters of Public Administration, The Ohio State University,

B.A. with Honors in Government, College of William and Mary

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE

Humane Rescue Alliance, Vice Chair (current), 2008 – Present

Thomas Jefferson Program in Public Policy at the College of William and Mary, Advisory Board Member, 2014 – Present

Cheetah Conservation Fund, Trustee, 2018 - Present

Wine & Spirit Education Trust, Sommelier Level 3, 2021

Stennis Center for Public Service, Congressional Staff Fellowship, 2001 - 2002

NASA and U.S. EPA, Presidential Management Intern, 1990 – 1992